

Hella F. Yeager

*James Charleston paper -1-
a note about Ruler Yeager*

WONDERFUL SCENIC VIEWS AND FLASHES
OF AMERICAN HISTORY

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BATTLE OF DROOP MOUNTAIN

Droop Mtn

5.219
~~3.219~~
Jan 6

One day as you go bowling along over the Seneca Trail (Route 219) enjoying the scenic beauties of West Virginia you will come to a roadside marker, about thirty miles north of Lewisburg, which informs you that you are nearing "Droop Mountain Battlefield." A little further on you will see the massive rustic portals, constructed by the State Conservation Commission and the CCC boys, which mark the entrance to this historic spot-- a place where brothers crossed swords in mighty conflict for a cause in which each one of them believed.

Now, if you read on, it looks like you are in for a brief history lesson--a thing which you dread, but which will stand you in good stead when you visit this hallowed ground, direct your mind back over a space of 73 years and try to visualize what happened here.

The year 1863 was an important milestone in the history of West Virginia. It was on June 20th of that year that our fathers chose to separate from the Old Dominion and become a member of the family of states in their own right.

The Confederate Forces

At that time there was a Confederate force composed largely of Virginia cavalry and some artillery, and numbering about 4,000 men, under the command of General John Echols, which was based on Lewisburg and extended far up the Greenbrier Valley toward Durbin.

They formed a sort of outpost designed to protect Virginia from a Federal attack from the west. They lived on the country and found good pickings for man and beast from the rich bluegrass region.

A small Federal force under command of General William W. Averell and based on Elkins opposed the Confederates. Their mission was to protect the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, the main Federal line of rail communication from east to west. They were not of sufficient strength to undertake offensive operations against the Confederates and had to content themselves to play the role of an observation force.

On the Kanawha River at the mouth of Gauley there was another small force of Federals under the command of General A. N. Duffie, with the mission of preventing a Confederate movement down the Kanawha towards the Ohio River.

Following General Lee's 1863 invasion of the north, which ended in disaster at Gettysburg, Averell's command was reinforced and he was ordered to drive the Confederates out of the Greenbrier Valley. These reinforcements brought his strength up to about 5000 men, which gave him a small superiority in numbers. General Averell requisitioned horses from the nearby farms in the Tygart valley country and mounted much of his infantry, thus making his command about of equal mobility with that of his opponents.

Preliminary Operations

General Averell ordered General Duffie to march from Gauley Bridge to Lewisburg so as to arrive there on the afternoon of November 7. With his own command he marched south, leaving Beverly on November 1, and drove back the Confederate patrols that

occupied the northern reaches of the valley. When he learned that Averell was marching down the valley, General Echols proceeded to Droop Mountain with his main body, while he took up a defensive position with the idea of providing a rallying point for his advanced troops which were being driven back by the Federals, there to make a stand and stop the further advance of Averell. A line of breastworks and gun positions was constructed across the main road, which we now know as the "Seneca Trail" (Route 219) where it crosses the mountain.

Apparently General Echols had learned of the approach of General Duffie's force coming east from Gauley Bridge but left no considerable force at Lewisburg to oppose him. Averell's main body arrived in the vicinity of Hillsboro on the evening of November 4th. They established their outposts close to the foot of Droop Mountain and started immediately with the reconnaissance of the Confederate position. The entire day of November 5 was consumed in this reconnaissance, which developed the fact that the position was too strong to be taken to direct assault. There was a lot of skirmishing during the day and that evening General *Averell* decided upon his plan of battle. In the meantime General Duffie was approaching Lewisburg from the west.

The Battle

Early on the morning of November 6, 1865, General Averell dispatched a force of about 1100 men composed of the 18th Ohio Infantry and the 14th Pennsylvania Cavalry to march west and south on the Lobelia road, a detour of six miles, to attack the left flank and rear of the Confederate position on Droop Mountain. He

also sent a small detachment out to the east to demonstrate against the right flank of the Confederate position,

General Echols was content to defend his strong position on the mountain and apparently had no information that a federal force was approaching on his left flank.

At 1:45 p m, just when the skirmishing along the front was at its height, the Federal right flanking detachment broke in on the left flank and rear of the Confederate position, Averell pushed forward his assault up the mountain on the front and the left flanking detachment closed in. Echols threw in part of his reserves to stem the tide and for a short period of time there was some desperate fighting on top of the mountain. Seeing that the Federal right flank force was closing in on his rear in an endeavor to gain the road to Lewisburg, Echols sent in the last of his reserves and all of the troops he could withdraw from the main position to counter this move. He succeeded in doing so and managed to withdraw his whole command and get it on the road to Lewisburg. By four o'clock in the afternoon his troops were on the road in more or less orderly formation and covered by an organized rear guard which covered the retreat. His rear guard passed through Lewisburg at about ten o'clock on the forenoon of November 7, just as Duffie's advance guard reached the western entrance of the town.

Averell did not push the pursuit too vigorously because he thought that Duffie would be able to cut off the Confederates at Lewisburg. But by marching all night and the fact that his mounts were rested and fresh, Echols was able to save practically his entire command to fight another day. The Confederates continued their retreat on down through Union and crossed over into Virginia at Peterstown.